Okinawa as a Reference: Place and History of “Okinawan Struggles” in East Asia

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Abstract

This research aims to show significance of Okinawan struggles in East Asian regional context where diverse autonomous social practices from the Cold War regime have taken places. By focusing my attention on a group of Okinawan people called Okinawa-Korea People’s Solidarity (hereafter Okikan) and its socio-historical context, I will reveal importance of Okinawa’s translocal practices on anti-militarism which Okikan have conducted for the last twenty-five years. It has been gradually common that Okinawan struggles start to network with overseas counterparts since the mid-1990s such as Guam, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico on the issue of military violence against Human Rights and developmentalism. However, one of uniqueness brought up by Okinawa’s cross-cultural practices is that it fuses history and memory of colonialism of East Asia, particularly of Korea, to historicity of Okinawan struggles. Okikan’s unique nature as a group which consists of Japanese and Okinawan New Left movement in the 1960s and 70s, Zainichi Korean’s activism, and their contingent synchronisation shows a distinctive place consciousness in Okinawa. Thus, I will discuss that their translocal activity complicates the matters of place, place-bounded identity and its history, and compels us to see multilayered sense of these matters in Okinawan antimilitarism. As the tide of cultural reductionism and racialised discourse on Okinawa grow in sway and influence as both radical and conservative attempts, this research unveil alternative historical account on resistance for autonomy in Okinawa. In order to examine these issues, I will explore the questions: (1) how does Okikan see history of Okinawa and “Okinawan struggles”? (2) how does Okikan’s translocal place consciousness understand racialised discourse on Okinawan such as Ryukuans nationalism? (3) what has Okikan’s brought up new elements with Okinawan anti-militarism movement and how?

Keyword: Okinawan struggles, anti-militarism, colonialism, cross-cultural practices, place consciousness